

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) An apparatus for controlling a throttle opening degree, which is an opening degree of a throttle valve of an internal combustion engine mounted on a vehicle, wherein the vehicle has a driving system coupled to an output shaft of the internal combustion engine, the apparatus comprising:

a controller, wherein the controller sets a target value of the throttle opening degree based on a depression degree of an acceleration pedal provided in the vehicle, wherein the controller gradually changes the throttle opening degree at a predetermined gradual change speed such that the throttle opening degree reaches the target value, and wherein a rotation speed of the output shaft changes in accordance with changes in the throttle opening degree,

wherein the controller limits the gradual change speed of the throttle opening degree for a predetermined period such that a changing speed of the rotation speed of the output shaft is suppressed at a reverse time when a direction of torque transmitted between the driving system and the output shaft is reversed,

wherein the driving system includes an input shaft and a coupling mechanism, wherein the coupling mechanism couples the input shaft to the output shaft while permitting the input shaft and the output shaft to rotate relative to each other, and wherein the controller recognizes a reverse of the direction of torque based on switching in the order of the values of the rotation speed of the output shaft and the rotation speed of the input shaft.

2. (Canceled)

3. (Currently amended) The apparatus according to claim [[2]] 1, wherein, after the order of the values of the rotation speed of the output shaft and the rotation speed of the input shaft is switched and when the difference between the

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